

HISTORY

451st Bombardment Group (H)

CHAPTER II

Period Covered:

Aug. 22, 1943 - Sept. 30, 1943

The night of August 28, 1943, will always be remembered by the Group as the Night of the Big Wind.

Tents had blown down before, both on the tent area and on the line, but this night it seemed as though the elements really were out to sink the Group. A gale swept across the Salt Lake Desert, and while it was just wind, as far as other outfits, comfortably housed in wooden buildings were concerned, it was plain trouble for the Group. Tents went down like ten pins, crashing down wooden supports, flopping, full of salt and sand and dirt, over sleeping men, who thought they were perhaps being bombed.

There was no stopping the cavorting tents. The wind steamed up until it was hitting a howling high, and it showed no favorites. Men woke sleepily, climbed out of their tents to aid disgruntled companions, only to turn their backs and hear their own tents sigh tiredly and collapse. Beds and belongings were playthings before the wind, and a man's fresh-washed socks usually ended up in the quarters of a total stranger, who thanked the Gods for gifts bestowed.

Over on the line, Second Lt. Eli Zinn, Engineering Officer for the 727th, was supervising a crew of men accomplishing an acceptance check on a B-24. The crew had accomplished the check in a 12-hour period some days before on another plane, were complimented for their industry, and were keen on repeating or even bettering, if possible, the performance.

Then came the wind. The men looked hopefully at Lt. Zinn, and he yielded, and permitted them to hurry to the tent area and see what was happening to their belongings, especially those new pictures of their girlfriends and wives. When they got there they howled in misery. Their prized possessions were scattered half across the Wendover Air Base, the wind was getting worse, if anything, and there was no time to cleanup.

Sadly they returned to their duties, their hands ready but unwilling, their minds on beds overturned and sand-filled. Under the

drive of Lt. Zinn, however, they plunged ahead and finished the check well within the 12-hour limit they set for themselves - and then, finished, rushed back to the tent area to retrieve what was retrievable.

One enlisted man indicated the terrors and sounds of war will never interfere with his night's slumber. He woke at 0530, as was his want. His tent was blown down and he had been sleeping unprotected under the cold Utah dawn. Half his clothing was blown away. His bed was covered with sand. He sat up, blinked his eyes, and asked: "What happened? Was it windy during the night?"

It was a testimony to forbearance that he was not broken in half by groggy friends.

In all, 100 tents were blown down. But by 1400 that same day every tent was back in place, the area was cleared of all debris, and work continued. There was not a single minute lost in the training program due to the devastation of the wind.

On Saturday, Sept. 4, Brigadier General Eugene L. Eubank, the then Commanding General of the Second Bomber Command, inspected the Group. He was treated, inadvertently, to a spectacle of close cooperation between a group plane and group control officers in the tower. The cooperation averted what might have been a serious, perhaps fatal, accident.

First Lieutenant Kendall S. Young, Operations Officer of the 727th, was flying a B-24 in a training mission, when he discovered, on coming in for a landing, that he could not lock his landing gear in place. He radioed the tower for instructions. It so happened at the time that Gen. Eubank, the Commanding Officer of the Group, the Deputy Group Commander, and the Group Operations Officer were in the tower at the time.

The Group Operations Officer began a careful and painstaking conversation with Lt. Young, advising him, calming him, and in so doing, talking him in to a perfect landing. The gear was lowered, although it was impossible to lock it, and then, talking all the time to the Group Operations Officer, Lt. Young brought in the plane. The weight of the plane and the impact of the landing locked the gear.

An investigation later disclosed that the actuating cylinder was still unlocked, and jammed, and that until the plane landed the gear was not locked.

The landing was made so beautifully, the teamwork between the tower and the pilot so perfect, that Gen. Eubank expressed great satisfaction, and then walked out onto the ramp and personally commended Lt. Young for his skill and calmness. He requested the name, rank and serial number of the officer for his own records.

Early the following morning the Group Commander, accompanied by his Executive Officer, Engineering Officer, and other assistants, flew to Sioux City, and then proceeded to the Fairmont Army Air Field to which base the entire group was about to be transferred for continued training.

Facilities were inadequate at Wendover. The Group Commander inspected the new base, made plans for the disposition of personnel and equipment, and then returned to Wendover. Plans for the transfer were developed without interfering with the training scheduled, which went on unbrokenly.

On Sept. 8, the Ground Echelon of the 724th and 725th Squadrons departed Wendover by train. The Group Executive Officer was the Train Commander for the 724th, and his command comprised 44 officers and 295 enlisted men. The Executive Officer of the 725th Squadron was the Train Commander for his own squadron, which included 29 officers and 305 enlisted men.

The two squadrons remaining in Wendover continued to fly and service the planes for the entire group. On September 11, both the ground echelons of the remaining two squadrons, and the air echelon for the entire group, departed for Fairmont.

The Group air echelon, comprising 93 officers and enlisted men under the command of the Group Commander, left Wendover at 1100 hours in 11 airplanes and arrived at Fairmont at 1700 hours, CWT.

The ground crews of the two squadrons who left three days earlier were waiting on the planes, and set to work conditioning them for flying as soon as they landed. That same afternoon, every one of the planes was taken aloft again by crews in training. The 11 planes flew a total of 79 hours of training missions on September 11, the same afternoon and evening they arrived from Wendover.

That same evening the ground echelon remaining at Wendover departed. The Executive Officer of the 726th was train commander over his own squadron, comprising 42 officers and 290 enlisted men. The Executive Officer of the 727th Squadron commanded the 37 officers and 258 enlisted men of his own squadron. The Group Adjutant, traveling

with the 726th, was in command of the entire echelon of both squadrons.

The train movement, both on the 8th and the 11th, was made as a model train movement, with secrecy and security emphasized. The enlisted men and officers were impressed with the fact that the group now was alerted for overseas movement, and that secrecy was of paramount importance in connection with all moves made from then on out.

The entire personnel were given strict lectures on security and secrecy by squadron intelligence officers prior to departure, and the articles of war, were again read to the enlisted men.

The movements were made as troop movements. Kitchens were aboard all trains. Food, service and efficiency were rated excellent by all persons who took part in the movement.

Quarters at Fairmont were deemed greatly superior to those of Wendover. Instead of tents, subject to the whims of the weather, roomy buildings were provided for the entire personnel, both to work and live in. Quarters on the line were spacious and well built, insulated against the cold of oncoming winter. Living quarters were substantial and roomy.

The group found itself the only tactical organization on the field, and able at last to proceed with training without interference from any other quarter. On September 17, 34 more crews arrived, and were distributed among the squadrons.

By the end of the month 18 more airplanes were allotted the group including 7 of the new B-24Hs, with a new gun turret in the nose. The group then had, in all, 29 airplanes.

An atmosphere of excitement was gradually increasing among the personnel, both officers and enlisted men, as the training began to sharpen itself to a fine and recognizable edge.

Lecture by intelligence officers were inaugurated as a weekly feature in the huge war room, and, aided by maps and electrical projections, the intelligence officers kept the group up to date on all war developments throughout the world, in all theaters.

Enlisted men were continued in ground school, trained in security and secrecy, Articles of War. Their physical training was not

neglected and drill and calisthenics were held for the men daily. Officers took calisthenics three times a week in the post gymnasium.

The goal of overseas combat seemed closer than ever, and the feeling electrified the men and sped up the interest in training in the air and on the ground.